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A COMMANDER'S ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION:
KOSOVO & THE SOUTHERN BALKANS


by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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THESIS

There is a continuing possibility that another Balkan War could erupt in the near future. A massive flood of ethnic Albanian refugees flowing from the Serbian province of Kosovo into Macedonia and the surrounding countries could ignite a violent regional conflict. This nightmare scenario could lead to direct clashes between NATO members Greece and Turkey, as well as Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, and Bulgaria. Thus, the containment of an expanded Balkan war is of paramount concern to NATO and the United States. The current commitment of forces to Bosnia was made in part to ensure the long-term credibility of the Alliance. The prevention of a military confrontation between two member states is even more critical. In addition, the potential humanitarian crisis that could result from continued Serbian aggression in and of itself calls for some sort of international involvement.

The possibility of such renewed warfare in the Balkans will be used in this paper to develop a "Commander's Estimate of the Situation." The estimate will outline the parameters of such a crisis and develop possible military options to help in its resolution. It will incorporate both strategic and operational factors. A major assumption of this paper is that a political decision has already been made directing NATO forces to prepare for potential military action. Therefore, the broader issue of whether or not the United States should become involved in Kosovo at all will not be addressed. Also, due to the complexity of the situation in Kosovo the standard format for a commander's estimate has been modified. Following a detailed mission analysis and review of factors that may affect possible courses of action, there is only a brief assessment of options available to the belligerent parties in the conflict. The final section of the estimate includes a comparison of possible NATO courses of action and a recommendation.

MISSION ANALYSIS

Perhaps the most important first step in preparing for any military operation is to conduct a thorough mission analysis to determine exactly what must be accomplished. The complexity of this task is compounded in peace operations where the initial political guidance available to a commander is often vague and ill defined. This is quite true in the case of the situation in Kosovo. Indeed, there are numerous sources that provided varying degrees of direction to NATO and the United States European Command to develop plans for direct military action. In October 1998, President Clinton reiterated three broad objectives to help resolve the situation in Kosovo. "First, to end the violence that threatens the fragile stability of the Balkans. Second, to prevent a humanitarian crisis from becoming a catastrophe by stopping the repression of Kosovo Albanians. And third, to put Kosovo back into the hands of its people by giving them self-government again."¹

There are also three relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) regarding the situation in Kosovo -- Resolution 1160, 1199, and 1203.² UNSCR 1160, adopted on 31 March 1998, established an arms embargo on Yugoslavia to halt the flow of weapons to all belligerents. It also called upon the authorities in Belgrade and the Kosovo leadership to enter into "meaningful dialogue." However, in September 1998, UNSCR 1199 elevated these *requests* for compliance into *demands* by the international community for the cessation of all hostilities in Kosovo. Under the provisions of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, this resolution condemned the increasing violence as a threat to peace and stability in the region. It clearly defined requirements for compliance by the Kosovo Albanians or Kosovars, as well as the Serbs. However, the resolution also calls for the seemingly contradictory objectives of honoring the current territorial borders of Yugoslavia and seeking autonomy for Kosovo. Ambassador Robert

S. Gelbard, Special Representative of the President and the Secretary of State reiterated these objectives and possible shortcomings when he stated that:

A solution for the problems of Kosovo can and must be found within existing international borders. The UCK will not be able to shoot its way out of Yugoslavia. But neither can Belgrade maintain its authority in Kosovo with a nightstick clutched in an iron hand. There is no battlefield solution for either side. Only open dialog and sincere negotiations can resolve the current impasse.³

Given these broader goals for possible NATO action in Kosovo, the defense ministers of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) provided the most relevant guidance for military planners. As early as June, they directed a review of the full range of options with the following mission:

Halting or disrupting a systematic campaign of violent repression and expulsion in Kosovo, supporting international efforts to secure a cease-fire, and helping to create the conditions for serious negotiations toward a political settlement. [Providing] advice on the employment of NATO military forces to monitor and enforce a cease-fire and negotiated peace settlement.⁴

When renewed fighting erupted last October, the NAC also issued an activation order for potential airstrikes in the hope that this would compel the parties to negotiate. NATO later reiterated the broad purpose of its strategy is "to halt the violence and support the completion of negotiations on an interim political settlement" in order to avert humanitarian catastrophe.⁵

MISSION STATEMENT

The objectives established by the President, the goals identified in the Security Council Resolutions, and planning guidance directed by the North Atlantic Council can be synthesized into the following mission statement:

On order, NATO and partner nation forces will conduct military operations in and around the Kosovo region in support of United Nations Security Council Resolutions to secure a cease-fire agreement and help to create the conditions for a negotiated political settlement. Upon establishment of a peace settlement, NATO forces will monitor and enforce the cease-fire, deter hostilities, stabilize the peace, and contribute to a secure environment by providing a military presence.

From this statement it is evident that this complex mission has the potential of requiring a shift from a peace enforcement operation to a peacekeeping and possibly back to peace enforcement.

Although similar forces may be required, U.S. policy and military doctrine traditionally make clear distinctions between these two types of operations. The key distinguishing variables include the level of consent of the parties involved, the authority granted to use force, and the maintenance of impartiality. U.S. Army Field Manual 100-23, Peace Operations, offers some guidelines.⁶ In *peace enforcement*, consent is not absolute, force is used to compel or coerce, and there may be skepticism as to the impartiality of the force. On the other hand, in *peacekeeping*, the belligerent parties give clear consent to the presence and operations of the intervention, force may only be used in self-defense or defense with a mandate, and the appearance of impartiality is more easily maintained.

Another useful frame of reference to determine the possible tasks that will be required of NATO forces in Kosovo is the Dayton Peace Accord for Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁷ In that agreement the Implementation Force's (IFOR) mission involved "obligations" explicitly stated in the agreement and potential tasks for which there was no specific commitment. Although, the latter could be executed at the discretion of the commander as the need arose, the primary responsibility for the success of the Dayton Accord rested with the Parties.

Further analysis yields the following Specified and Implied Tasks for the NATO force:

SPECIFIED TASKS

- Halt or disrupt a systematic campaign of violent repression in Kosovo.
- Support diplomatic efforts and help create conditions for serious negotiations.
- Assist in enforcement of the arms embargo.
- Monitor and enforce the cease-fire.
- Deter hostilities by all belligerents.
- Stabilize the peace, and contribute to a secure environment by providing a military presence.

IMPLIED TASKS

- Provide a safe and secure environment for potential local elections.
- Encourage regional stability and deter spill-over of conflict into neighboring countries.
- Plan for air operations, including phased air strikes and patrols of "no fly zones."
- Supervise the marking of boundaries and zones of separation (ZOS) between the belligerents.
- Monitor, and if necessary, enforce the withdrawal of forces to their respective territories.
- Establish and man zones of separation.
- Assist the movement of various organizations in the accomplishment of humanitarian missions.
- Prevent interference with the movement of civilian populations, refugees, and displaced persons.
- Assist in the establishment and training of a local Kosovar police force.

OTHER FACTORS

Several key assumptions underlay this analysis. The first of these is that there will eventually be a negotiated peace agreement, either with or without direct military coercion by NATO. Another is that the primary responsibility for the success of the intervention resides with the Kosovars and the Serbs themselves. NATO cannot *impose* a lasting peace. In regards to Rules of Engagement, those used for the Bosnia IFOR will provide the initial source of reference, but they will be further developed in the planning process.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION

SPACE

Military Geography.⁸ Serbia controls one of the major land routes from Western Europe to Greece and Turkey. Kosovo lies in southwestern Serbia along the borders with Albania and Macedonia. The prevailing geographic characteristic of the area is a high inland plain that is flanked to the north and the south by mountains. The terrain throughout the rest of Serbia is also extremely varied and includes rich plains to the north, limestone ranges and basins to the east, and more mountains to the southeast. Kosovo is relatively small in area of perhaps less than 13,000 square kilometers. (In total, Serbia encompasses only 88,412 square

kilometers.) Neither Kosovo nor the rest of Serbia have any coastline, but Montenegro has about 237 kilometers along the Adriatic Sea. The climate in the region is generally hot and humid in the summer with cold winters and heavy snowfalls in the mountains.

Transportation. As can be seen from the description of terrain, overland movement to and from Kosovo can be quite difficult. The road networks throughout Serbia and Montenegro total less than 29,000 kilometers of paved roads. There are also approximately 4,000 kilometers of railways. The two major ports in Montenegro are Bar and Zelnika. The primary rivers used for waterborne transport are the Sava and the Danube. Although there is an airbase near Pristina, the regional capital of Kosovo, there are no major airports. One possible movement plan being developed by British planners to overcome these challenges in getting a force to Kosovo would entail travel by ship from Germany to the Greek port of Thessaloniki.⁹ From there they would travel by rail over 300 kilometers north into Macedonia and then roadmarch the remaining sixty kilometers to Pristina.

Economy / Telecommunications. "Any assessment of Yugoslavia's economy cannot avoid concluding that without reform, the country's economic prospects are dim."¹⁰ Although UN imposed economic sanctions were lifted in December 1995 after the signing of the Dayton Accords, Serbia still lacks any major support from international financial institutions. Less than thirty percent of the land overall is arable and there are limited natural resources. The annual per capita gross domestic product is less than \$2,280 and the overall inflation rate is over 35%.¹¹ Economic conditions in Kosovo are even bleaker. Poverty amongst the Kosovo Albanians is the norm. The potential for a humanitarian refugee crisis abounds in the face of continued violence. The total domestic communications system in Serbia and Montenegro includes 27 radio stations and eight television stations (1 state owned and 7 private). There are approximately one million

televisions and over 700,000 telephones. Information on actual telecommunications assets in Kosovo is unavailable.

Demography and Culture. The key demographic issue in Kosovo is that ethnic Albanians comprise 90 per cent of the population, but have very limited political rights or economic advantage. The 10 per cent Serbian minority controls almost all power in the region. (Overall in Serbia, ethnic Albanians make up about 14 per cent of the total population.) In addition, where the Kosovars are mostly Muslim, the Serbs are Orthodox. There is a similar split in language: Serbo-Croatian is predominant in most of the country, but Albanian is the dominant language among Kosovo's poor.

Although few Serbs live (or actually want to live) in Kosovo, it is regarded as an integral part of their national identity. It is the focus of Serb folklore as the site of what is commonly regarded as the defining event in the national consciousness -- the defeat of medieval Serbian heroes at the hands of invading Ottoman Turks in 1389. Slobodan Milosevic has consistently used this theme as a rallying cry for ethnic Serb nationalism in support of his power. He also plays on the fears of Serbs who often stereotype ethnic Albanians as nothing but terrorists and thugs. Even so, it is useful to consider another perspective on the limits of ethnic hatred as a driving force in the region. Noted Balkan author Misha Glenny wrote that:

It has become commonplace to assume that Serbia, driven by irrational blood-lust, is now determined to start a war in the southern province of Kosovo... This is a fundamental and dangerous misapprehension of the nature of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. At the heart of the wars lies the struggle for territorial acquisition and not blood-lust.¹²

Politics. Although faultlines in Kosovo can be loosely traced to ancient times, the more relevant political issues can be best understood through an understanding of more recent events.¹³ In 1974, following almost six years of sustained uprisings by the Kosovars against

Marshal Tito's communist control, limited autonomy was finally granted for the region.

Although Kosovo was not independent and did not have the equivalent status as the other six provinces of Yugoslavia, ethnic Albanians did enjoy many freedoms. These included Albanian language schools, observance of Islamic holy days, representation in the federal presidency, and local police force. However, after Tito's death and the subsequent collapse of the communist system, Slobodan Milosevic used the issue of Kosovo to rally Serbs and propel him to power. In 1989, Milosevic revoked the provinces autonomous status and established virtual marshal law with large numbers of Serbian police and troops. As a result of this control, the Kosovars developed a shadow system of government, health care, and taxation. Eventually, it also gave rise to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

Today, according to many observers, Milosevic is the greatest "single obstacle to any sustainable solution in Kosovo."¹⁴ He continues to use Kosovo as a means to bolster his regime and retain his almost total control over the Serb government. On the other side, one of the greatest internal political issues facing the Kosovo Albanians is the fractured and disparate number of groups hoping to represent the majority and gain eventual power. The international community has become allied with Ibrahim Rugova, the president of the self-declared shadow Kosovo Republic government. His Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) espouses a non-violent resolution, and he has virtually no power over the events on the grounds that are increasingly dominated by the KLA. The negotiations ongoing today are based on a rough plan for greater autonomy over a three year period with further discussion on a long term resolution being deferred until then. The United States and other Western negotiators insist that full independence not be on the table at this time. "The Albanian side, while grateful for the respite brought by October's cease-fire and the deployment of the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM),

have yet to be offered a reasonable deal which contains so much as a distant prospect of them achieving their eventual goal of independence. For Milosevic, meanwhile, the longer Kosovo remains in crisis, the better for him.”¹⁵

FORCES: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, CENTERS OF GRAVITY

Detailed information about the forces either currently engaged in Kosovo operations or could become involved in the future is rather limited. However, the three major players will include the Serbian regular army and paramilitary forces, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), and NATO. In addition to noting the strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities of each force, each of the following sections identifies potential operational and strategic centers of gravity.

Serbia. Serbian “ground forces are currently unprepared for major offensive operations because of their poor state of training, bad morale, lack of discipline, and inadequate logistical support.”¹⁶ The total Yugoslav Army (JA) strength is approximately 90,000. They have approximately 1,000 older T-34 and T-54/55 medium tanks and 450 armored vehicles. The regular JA forces in Kosovo number approximately 11,000 in the Pristina Armored Corps. In addition there are over 10,000 paramilitary troops from the Interior *Ministry (Ministarstvo unutrasnjih poslova – MUP)*.¹⁷ The MUP is armed with small arms, armored personnel carriers and some helicopters. They are also capable of accessing over a 21,000 man police reserve. A third Serbian force in Kosovo is the unpredictable militia – *Srpska dobrovoljacka garda* or SVG.

In addition to these ground forces, Serbia has an effective integrated air defense system of tracking radar and missiles. This includes over 2,000 anti-aircraft guns, shoulder-launched weapons, as well as both fixed and SA-6 mobile missiles. The Yugoslav Air Force has limited capability and the most advance combat aircraft includes at least two squadrons of 28 MiG-29.

However, these are “reportedly being moved into hardened bunkers to protect them against

possible air attack. President Milosevic is unlikely to want to risk them against NATO's comprehensive air armada."¹⁸ The navy is comprised of only a small force of frigates and patrol boats armed with anti-ship missiles. There are reportedly two operational submarines in the fleet that could be difficult to detect in the Adriatic Sea.

Both the strategic and operational center of gravity can be found in the power and personality of President Slobodan Milosevic. He is the key to affecting all Serb operations.

Kosovo Albanians. By far the most difficult element to assess in this conflict is the Kosovo Liberation Army (also known as the *Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosoves* – UCK). According to one source, it began with a small core group of émigrés in Switzerland who included a mix of radical nationalists, supporters of greater Albania, and hard-core Stalinists.¹⁹ As late as March 1998, their numbers amounted to only a few thousand dedicated partisans. However, as Serbian paramilitary forces became more and more repressive, this cadre has been “subsequently joined by thousands of armed villagers desperate to defend their homes against Serb attacks.”²⁰ There is a growing professionalism in the ranks and the hard-core members have become increasingly violent, waging retaliatory strikes against both civilian and military Serb targets. Even so, the KLA is still composed primarily of peasant farmers and ordinary Kosovars who raised arms in self-defense. Their weapons include mostly small arms and some anti-tank launchers. Every day that the conflict continues, the KLA becomes better armed, trained and organized, it gains even more popular support. To overcome their weakness in arms, they leverage unpredictability.

The key strategic center of gravity for the KLA is the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo. For now, the operational centers of gravity can be found in the factional leaders. Without focused leadership and training, these groups will never be more than armed bands.

NATO. As early February 1999, most NATO members nations had agreed to commit a substantial number of forces for potential military action in the Kosovo area of operations.²¹ Although the initial focus was on aircraft and ships in preparation for strikes against the Serbs, the number of ground troops required for a subsequent peacekeeping mission could be as high as 30,000. The bulk of naval firepower will come from the U.S. Sixth Fleet – primarily from the USS Eisenhower and its 48 strike aircraft. An American missile cruiser group of five ships and two attack submarines are also routinely accompanies the Eisenhower. The main weapon available from the cruisers is the Tomahawk cruise missile. The current NATO aircraft available numbers approximately 430 in a mix of F-18 fighter-bombers, F-14s, F-16 fighters, Mirages, Jaguars, Tornados, and Harriers. At least 260 of these are U.S. planes.

Even though NATO has a clear superiority in weapons and personnel, they may have little influence on the ground to build a consensus without trying to impose it military. For example, as one Western diplomat put it, “we don’t have leverage on the KLA. It is the missing element in our overall strategy.”²² As in most operations, the strategic center of gravity for the United States and NATO in this type of operation is the popular support of each member country’s citizenry. The operational centers of gravity are individual soldiers on the ground and the potential vulnerability to casualties.

POSSIBLE BELLIGERENT COURSES OF ACTION

BELLIGERENT OBJECTIVES

There may be only one issue on which both Slobodan Milosevic and the KLA leadership agree -- a negotiated settlement does not fully support either of their major political objectives. According to one recent assessment, for Milosevic a negotiated settlement may jeopardize his

political position in Serbia.²³ More than anything else, his primary objective is to retain his power base in Serbia. "The KLA, on the other hand, understands that the West will continue to press for autonomy in Kosovo. Through military action and territorial gain, the KLA may be able to obtain de facto independence, forcing Serbia to relinquish its claim to the region."²⁴ Independence from Serbian rule is their driving objective.

BELLIGERENT COURSES OF ACTION

Serbia. The options available to Milosevic in the face of increasingly united international pressure are limited and none offers him any easy way to insulate his regime²⁵:

- (1) Grant the Kosovo Albanians total independence. Under this option, Milosevic would be denounced as the traitor to the Serb people. It could also eventually lead to an effort for Kosovo to unite with Albania.
- (2) Continue the policy of repression or even full-scale war against the KLA. This risks significant NATO intervention and possibly even foreign occupation, without much hope of eradicating the KLA insurgents.
- (3) Grant Kosovo autonomy within Serbia, or as a third republic. This meets the demands of the international community and could lead to more normal economic and political relations. However, the Kosovars would become a significant political force within Serb parliaments. This would appear to be the most likely option.

Kosovo Liberation Army. Realistically, the KLA has only two options. The first and most desirable of these is to negotiate and eventually accept a deal that provides for the limited autonomy Kosovo enjoyed until 1989. This offers legitimacy to their cause and possibility of independence in the long term. The second course of action is to continue their offensive guerilla struggle and terrorist campaign. This, of course, may provide some short-term gain, but risks international condemnation and withdrawal of support. In addition, this approach is likely to generate major Serbian retaliation and repression beyond the KLA's defensive capability.

POSSIBLE NATO COURSES OF ACTION

COURSE OF ACTION #1: AIR STRIKES ALONE

This course of action essentially continues the current approach to dealing with the crisis in Kosovo by using the credible threat of airstrikes against Serbian targets to provide leverage for the diplomatic effort. If violence by the Serbs continues against ethnic Albanians or Slobodan Milosevic chooses not to negotiate a settlement, limited bomb and cruise missile attacks will be made against military targets. As an escalation option, a "no-fly zone" could be established to limit the ability of Serbian military planes and helicopters from supporting operations in Kosovo. Even if a negotiated settlement is reached, this option would entail ensuring compliance with the agreement through the threat of air strikes. Ground forces would have a minimal role. Instead, the civilian Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission (KDOM) would be the primary guarantors.

COURSE OF ACTION #2: GROUND FORCES INTERVENTION

This option would attempt to leverage the success of either the threat or direct result of airstrikes and then deploys a ground force to implement a negotiated settlement. It is modeled upon the Dayton Accord that was adopted to end the fighting in Bosnia. One NATO contingency plan for this option suggests that as many as 36,000 troops would be needed to enforce any peace agreement between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians.²⁶ These forces would be arrayed in assigned sectors throughout Kosovo. The key elements of the mission would be to separate the warring parties and help establish a secure environment so that civilian authorities could conduct fair elections and establish a local Albanian police force.

COURSE OF ACTION #3: ONLY PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE KLA

Under this approach, NATO would not become militarily involved in Kosovo. Rather it would provide overt and covert assistance to the KLA rebel forces. This would include financial backing, limited military training, and weapons. It takes a long-term approach in order to allow the KLA to develop into a viable military opponent that can provide protection to the local Albanian population.

COMPARISON OF OPTIONS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Course of Action #1. The most critical point regarding airstrikes is that while they may be sufficient to stop the immediate violence, they cannot by themselves resolve the long-term conflict on the ground. They do not facilitate a separation of the parties and continue to place to difficult a requirement on the diplomatic observer mission – the KDOM. In regards to a potential no-fly zone, the effectiveness would be limited because of the lack of Serb use of these to affect the events. They rely more on direct terror. Airstrikes alone also provide no leverage over the KLA.

Course of Action #2. The success of such an intervention has been, and continues to be, demonstrated in Bosnia. It provides the best means to ensure compliance with the requirements of a negotiated peace agreement, especially when combined with a viable civilian assistance effort and backed by airpower. This force would ensure that the warring parties are fully separated and maintain order for the time needed to reestablish locally administered policing. On the negative side, another large-scale deployment of ground forces to the region will be very costly and not politically desirable in home capitals. “Balkan Fatigue” is a very real possibility. This is of particular concern if none of the belligerents support the presence of NATO ground

forces. Extreme elements of side, KLA or Serb, could undermine the entire operation with even limited attacks on NATO troops.

Course of Action #3. An operation designed to only provide support to the KLA in an effort to enable them to seize their own independence is attractive because of the limited direct involvement by the United States and NATO. However, it fails on almost every other count. It would do nothing to stop the violence and in fact would only increase the level of conflict.

COMPARISON OF OPTIONS: PRINCIPLES OF MOOTW

A useful guide to use in assessing courses action for such a complex operation are the principles of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) established in Joint Doctrine.²⁷

These principles can also help in determining measures of effectiveness by which to assess the options. They include the following:

- (1) Direct every military operation towards a clearly defined, decisive and attainable **objective**.
- (2) **Unity of effort** in every operation ensures all means are directed to a common purpose.
- (3) **Security** is always important and depends on never permitting hostile factions to acquire a military, political, or informational advantage.
- (4) MOOTW may require **restraint** in order to apply appropriate military capabilities prudently.
- (5) **Perseverance** allows for measured, protracted application of military capability in support of strategic aims.
- (6) Committed forces must sustain the **legitimacy** of the operation and the host government, where applicable.

Principle

Objective
Unity of Effort
Security
Restraint
Perseverance
Legitimacy

Favors

COA #2
COA #1 and #2
COA #2
COA #3
COA #2
COA # 1 and #2

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based upon this brief analysis of the possible military options available to help resolve the ongoing conflict in Kosovo, Course of Action # 2 should be adopted by NATO. The deployment of a large and capable ground force in conjunction with a robust civilian effort has been proven effective in Bosnia. It is the best of the available options for Kosovo.

The complexities of the situation in Kosovo create new and extremely difficult challenges for commanders and their staffs, both in the planning and execution of military action. The commander's estimate process provides a useful means to help assess the mission and focus the efforts of planners. However, as can be seen from the above analysis, even this proven tool has limitations. The stakes in the Balkans will continue to be high. It will take creativity and dynamic leadership to address the difficult tasks that will undoubtedly be given to NATO and the United States military to help resolve the problems there.

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